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**NORFOLK ISLAND**

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BY CAPTAIN MACONOCHIE, R.N., K.H.,

**LATE SUPERINTENDENT.**

" Captain Maconochie did more for the reformation of these unhappy wretches than the most sanguine practical mind could beforehand have ventured even to hope. My knowledge of the convict's character warrants my saying expressly, that his views offer the only approximation that has ever yet been made to a correct penal theory, *&c."—Settlers and Convicts, or Recollections of Sixteen Years in Australia,* pp. 412-13.

LONDON:

JOHN OLLIVIER, b9, PALL MALL.
1848.

IN a recent debate in the House of **Commons** it was assumed his several Honourable Members, that the System of Convict Management maintained on Norfolk Island between the years 1840 and 1841 had failed, and that the recent excesses there prove this. It seems desirable, therefore, to let it be seen with some distinctness at once while that system was, what were its immediate results, and that the excesses in question arose entirely subsequent to its discontinuance. Inference, on the subject will be thus made more precise;—and to attain this, no: to indulge in egotistical feeling, is the object of the annexed narrative —A. M.

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**THE** condition of our Penal Settlement on Norfolk Island was brought under the particular attention of the Transportation Committee of the House of Commons in 1837-8. It was shown that very undue severities were inflicted in it, and that the ne­cessary result, extensive demoralization among the men, had ensued. In the strong language cited by one of the witnesses, the Rev. Dr. Ullathorne, as having been addressed to him by an unhappy victim of the system on the Island itself, " When a prisoner was sent to Norfolk Island he lost the heart of a man, and got that of a beast instead."

About the same time, a plan of managing prisoners suggested by me in Van Dieman's Land in 1837 was also brought under the notice of the committee, and received its qualified approbation. Its principles are as follows:

1. That the duration of sentences be measured by labour and good conduct combined, with a minimum of time, but no maximum, instead of, as now, by time only. The purpose of this is to make **a** man's liberation, when he is once convicted of a felony, depend on the subsequent conduct and character evidenced by him, rather than on the quality of his original offence. It is in the first that society really has an interest, and on which depends the security with which he may be again released. The last is an immutable fact. Amidst the varieties of constitution and temptations we can rarely estimate its real turpitude. When we can we are still unable to balance it against a due proportion of pain. And no amount of this last can either recall, or atone for it, or in any perceptible degree, as experience.shows, prevent its recurrence.
2. That the labour thus required be represented by marks ;— a certain number of these, proportioned to the original offence, being required to be earned in a penal condition before discharge. Then

according to the amount of work rendered, a proportion of them-should be credited day by day to the convict; --a moderate charge be made in them for all provisions and other supplies issued to him,-and should he misconduct himself a moderate fine in them be imposed on him, only the clear surplus. after all similar deductions, to count towards his liberation. . By this means it is sought to place his fate in his own hands, to give him a form of wages, impose on him a form of pecuniary fine (instead of flogging, ironing, or shutting him in a darken cell) for his prison offences, and make him feel the burthen and Aids

gation of his own maintenance,--and train him, while yet in bondage, in those habits of prudent accumulation, postponing the gratification of present tastes and impulses to ulterior advantages, which after dis-charge will best preserve him from again falling.

3. That to strengthen these moral checks and stimulants, when prisoners are kept together in numbers they be distributed into small parties (say) of six, with common interests, each man thus labouring 'e;r:

and refraining for others as well as for himself. By this means it is hoped to implant and cultivate kindly and social feelings, instead of the

intensely selfish ones which usually characterize the criminal, and especially grow up in the solitude of an unconnected crowd. It is thus

also sought to create a shadow of domestic ties even when in prison,

to give an interest to the krona to assist the weak, thereby equalizing

penal inflictions,and to make offence unpopular because injurious,

and good conduct popular because beneficial to several together, there, '.,

by.grwlually ereating an esprit de corps in all towards good.

And lastly, these several moral impulses being well organized, it is i:

recommended that they be confided in, with as little mixture of direct force in obtaining the ends contemplated in them as possible. The two sources of action are considered essentially antagonistic, and cane '.

not with advantage be in large measure combined. And thoughz

wherever prisoners are kept it is indispensable to have physical force ;':.

present, it is yet undoubted that frequent recurrence to it, being in itself moral failure, will always be found rapidly productive of more.

These principles, then, having been brought before the committee, though they did not receive its unqualified assent, were yet deemed promising, and recommended to be tried. Andy.

shortly afterwards I was appointed to the command of Norfolk Island.

I. arrived there on the 6th of March, 1840, and found the state, of things certainty not better, and in some respects even rather worse, than Iihad expected. 1400 doubly-convicted prisoners, the refuse of both penal colonies, (for the worst offenders were; sent here from Van Dieman's Land as well as New South Wales),':

were rigorously coerced all day, and cooped up at night in barracks which could not decently accommodate half the number,

iti overy way their feelings were habitually, outraged, and their -self-respect destroyed. They were required to cap each private soldier whom they met, and even each empty sentry-box that they passed. If they met a superior officer they were to take off their caps altogether, and stand aside, bare-headed, in a ditch if necessary, and whatever the weather, till he passed, in most cases without taking the smallest notice of them. For the merest trifles they were flogged, ironed, or confined in gaol for successive days on bread and water. The offences most severely visited in them were at the same time chiefly conventional, those against morals being but little regarded, compared with those against an unreasonable discipline. Thus the most horrid vices, with acts of brutal violence, or of dexterity in theft and robbery, were detailed to me by the officers as being exhibited among them, with little direct censure, and rather as anecdotes calculated to astonish and amuse a new-comer, --- while the possession of a pipe, a newspaper, a little tea, some article of clothing not furnished by the Government, or the omission of some mark of respect, or a saucy look, or word, or even an imputation of sullenness, were deemed unpardonable crimes. They were also fed more like hogs than men. Neither knives, nor forks, nor hardly any other conveniences were allowed at their tables. They tore their food with their fingers and teeth, and drank for the most part out of water-buckets. Not more than about two-thirds of them could even enter their mess-shed at a time; and the rest, whatever the weather, were required to eat as they could in an open shed beside a large privy. The Island had been fifteen years a penal settlement when I landed, yet not a single place of worship was erected on it. It had been seven years a settlement before even a clergyman was sent. There were no schools, no books; and the men's countenances reflected faithfully this description of treat­ment. A more demoniacal looking assemblage could not be imagined, and almost the most formidable sight I ever beheld was the sea of faces up-turned to me when I first addressed them. Yet, three years afterwards, I had the satisfaction of hearing Sir George Gipps ask me what I had done to make the men look so well ?—" he had seldom seen a better looking. set, *they were quite equal to new prisoners from England."* And this testimony seems to me the more valuable here, because it indirectly attests also the usual effect of the old colonial management, even in its best form, (for assignment still existed when Sir George Gipps arrived in New South Wales), on the aspect of those subjected to it.

It is impossible here to state in detail the means by which I

accomplished this great change, indicating, as it did,' other changes still greater and more important. Besides introducing most imperfectly my own system of management among them (for my marks never had a fixed value towards liberation assigned to them, which could alone make their accumulation really important), I sought generally by every means to recover the men's self-respect, to gain their own wills towards their reform, to visit moral offences severely, but to reduce the number of those that were purely conventional, to mitigate the penalties attached to these, and thus gradually awaken better and more enlightened, feelings among both officers and men. **I** built two churches, and got a catechist added to the establishment to assist the chaplain, --almost every Sunday during all my four years read the service myself, with a sermon, at someone or other out –station, established schools, distributed books, gave prizes for assiduity, was unwearied myself in my counsels and exhortations wherever I. went, and went everywhere, alone and unattended, showing confidence, and winning it in return. I also gave every man a small garden, which was a boon to the industrious, but none to the idle: those whom I camped out in the bush I encouraged also to rear pigs and poultry, thereby improving their ration, and, still more, infusing into them by the possession of property that instinctive respect for it which makes it safer in a community than any direct preservatives. I thus also interested my pollee, who were all prisoners, in the maintenance of order, .their situations, which I very much coveted, being made to depend on their success. **I** gave the messes knives, forks, a few cooking utensils, tin pannekins*.* I allowed the overseers, police, and other first-class men, to wear blue jackets, and other articles of dress not portions of usual convict clothing; and nothing contri­buted more than this to raise their spirits, revive their self-respect, and confirm their good purposes. And on one occasion I gave a glass of rum-punch to all hands to drink the Queen's health, and had two plays acted the same evening,---one of the wisest, and best-considered acts of my whole administration, and which has been the most pertinaciously censured.

It was on the first recurrence of Her Majesty’s birth-day after my arrival on the Island, that this act of high treason against existing notions of prison discipline occurred. **I** had then already organized my police, and got my men into comparative order and good humour. **I** had very early observed, all with great regret, amongst penal colonies generally, the hatred existing in most prisoners in them towards their native country and all her institutions, They have for the most part known little of her, **but**

of the object, and of its importance, even had the result proved unfavourable I could not have been justly or severely censured. But when not a shadow of disorder occurred, when bell and bugle recalled every poor fellow at night to his dungeon, or still more horrid ward, with a precision and punctuality that were to the last degree affecting, when for four years afterwards, by like means, that is to say by a careful combination of moral means, not neglecting, yet not obtrusively employing, physical ones in their stead, I preserved absolute tranquility on the Island, it may be conceded that my measures were at least not unwise, not ill-calculated to attain their end. I may have attached too much importance to that end; the recovery of Norfolk Island from the state in which I found it, and to which it seems to have reverted immediately on my departure, may be considered not to have been worthy of so many, and such t great deviations as I made from ordinary practice. These positions I shall not here dispute ;---I shall only record my own unabated conviction that, even if questionable as an isolated fact, yet as one of many similar measures, this was a wise and proper one, within the just scope of my discretion, and not deserving of any censure. Its immediate effect was prodigious. Men out of number have since declared to me that it chiefly contributed to win them. It inspired confidence, affection, and many collateral feelings. It revived the memory of home, and home festivals, which had long been forgotten. I never afterwards repeated the punch or the plays, but always celebrated the day in other respects in the same way. I also gave half holidays on St. George's, St. Patrick's, and St. Andrew's days, and on the anniversaries of Waterloo and Trafalgar. I had almost a dozen Waterloo men with me, to whom I also on this day gave a fresh dinner. I do not think that a more important point exists in regard to our distant colonies than thus maintaining home associations in them. And with **a** devoted attachment, almost a veneration, for these associations myself, I yet do not think they can be more usefully employed than in occasionally mitigating the harshness, and neutralizing some of the other results, of that cup of bitter suffering which has so long overflowed in the hands of the remote exiles of our laws. Loyalty and love of country are among the purest and least selfish of all the sen­timents of our nature, and thus too among the most improving;-- and in a reforming system of Penal Discipline, even much nearer home, it will be found well, I am persuaded, to recognize the wisdom of directly cultivating them.

But great objection has been also made to my allowing my